



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

NORA VARGAS
First District

JOEL ANDERSON
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Third District

NATHAN FLETCHER
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND
Fifth District

DATE: April 5, 2022

05

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**AUTHORIZE COMPETITIVE SOLICITATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH
SCREENING TO CARE INITIATIVE CONTRACTS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

On June 8, 2021 (3), San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) approved a final American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding framework to support the residents of San Diego County. The approved funding framework included the use of ARPA funding to address the behavioral health services needs of children, youth and families which were identified as high priority.

On December 7, 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory highlighting the urgent need to address the nation's youth mental health crisis and outlined the pandemic's unprecedented impacts on the mental health of America's youth and families, as well as the mental health challenges that existed long before the pandemic. The advisory outlined a series of recommendations to improve youth mental health which includes providing resources and technical assistance to strengthen school-based mental health programs. It specified improving education of mental health, increasing screening of students for mental health concerns, investing in additional staff (e.g., school counselors) to support student mental health needs and improving care coordination. It also highlighted the need for financing school-based mental health services, building school-provider partnerships, and coordinating resources to support prevention, screening, early intervention, and mental health treatment for youth in school-based settings.

To advance recommendations outlined in the advisory, and in alignment with other efforts to support youth, the *Screening to Care* initiative was created to address mental health treatment needs for middle school students working with school districts across the county. Today's action seeks approval to authorize a competitive solicitation for the procurement of *Screening to Care* services which will offer mental health services to middle school students in school districts through six contracts operating across the six regions as defined by the California Department of Education.

This item supports the County of San Diego's vision of a just, sustainable, and resilient future for all, specifically those communities and populations in San Diego County that have been historically left behind, as well as the ongoing commitment to the regional *Live Well San*

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Diego vision of healthy, safe and thriving communities. This will be accomplished by ensuring access to services, promoting health and well-being in children and families.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

In accordance with Section 401, Article XXIII of the County Administrative Code, authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, to issue competitive solicitations for the procurement of *Screening to Care* initiative services in all six regions and upon successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award contracts for an initial term of up to one year, with up to three option years, and up to an additional six months, if needed; and to amend the contracts to reflect changes in program, funding or service requirements, subject to the availability of funds and the approval of the Agency Director, Health and Human Services Agency.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

In the ten years preceding the pandemic, the rate of high school students who reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased by 40%. The pronounced increase in chronic sadness reported by youth even before the pandemic was a warning sign. The negative effects of the pandemic have exacerbated the deteriorating mental health of marginalized populations, furthering the health disparities that exist among underserved/underrepresented communities, and disproportionately impacting society's most vulnerable population - children and youth. Most notably, serious mental illness among African American and Hispanic/Latino youth (ages 10-14) was significantly higher than other racial/ethnic groups. To address the social, economic, cultural, geographic, and other barriers that often hinder the accessibility of behavioral health care, Behavioral Health Services, in partnership with key stakeholders, has taken strides to address the gap and bring services directly to communities of need.

The *Screening to Care* initiative will implement a universal screening tool for middle school children by creating connections to care, prior to high school, that will help empower youth and their families to access high quality, culturally competent, affordable, youth mental health resources in school settings, which are a trusted and accessible community asset. Today's action will advance efforts of behavioral health equity by decreasing barriers to mental health care access to children and youth by deploying resources proportionate to community need.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-23 County of San Diego Operational Plan. If approved, today's recommendation will result in no change in costs and revenue in FY 2021-22 and estimated annual costs and revenue of up to \$7,500,000 in FY 2022-23. The funding source is the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Behavioral Health Services will also pursue additional funding opportunities to support and sustain these services, including grants and federal and State allocations should they become available. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

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ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

At their meeting on March 3, 2022, the Behavioral Health Advisory Board voted to approve this recommendation.

BACKGROUND

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, before the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health challenges were the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes in young people, with up to 1 in 5 children ages 3 to 17 in the U.S. having a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder. Additionally, from 2009 to 2019, the share of high school students who reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased by 40%, to more than 1 in 3 students. Suicidal behaviors among high school students also increased during the decade preceding the pandemic, with 19% seriously considering attempting suicide, a 36% increase from 2009 to 2019, and about 16% having made a suicide plan in the prior year, a 44% increase from 2009 to 2019. Between 2007 and 2018, suicide rates among youth ages 10-24 in the U.S. increased by 57%, and early estimates show more than 6,600 suicide deaths among this age group in 2020.

The pandemic added to the pre-existing challenges that America's youth faced. It disrupted the lives of children and adolescents, such as in-person schooling, in-person social opportunities with peers and mentors, access to health care and social services, food, housing, and the health of their caregivers. The pandemic's negative impacts most heavily affected those who were vulnerable to begin with, such as youth with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ youth, low-income youth, youth in rural areas, youth in immigrant households, youth involved with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, and homeless youth. In 2020, rates of serious mental illness among African American and Hispanic/Latino youth (ages 10-14) were significantly higher than other racial/ethnic groups.

On December 7, 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health (Advisory) to highlight the urgent need to address the nation's youth mental health crisis. The Advisory called for a swift and coordinated response to this crisis as the nation continues to battle the COVID-19 pandemic and provided the following recommendations that individuals, families, community organizations, technology companies, governments, and others can take to improve the mental health of children, adolescents, and young adults. Recommended actions include:

- Recognizing that mental health is an essential part of overall health.
- Empowering youth and their families to recognize, manage, and learn from difficult emotions.
- Ensuring that every child has access to high-quality, affordable, and culturally competent mental health care.
- Supporting the mental health of children and youth in educational, community, and childcare settings; and expand and support the early childhood and education workforce.
- Addressing the economic and social barriers that contribute to poor mental health for young people, families, and caregivers.
- Increasing timely data collection and research to identify and respond to youth mental health needs more rapidly, to include more research on the relationship between technology

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and youth mental health, and technology companies should be more transparent with data and algorithmic processes to enable this research.

To advance recommendations outlined in the Advisory, and in alignment with other efforts to support youth, the *Screening to Care* initiative was created to address mental health treatment needs for middle school students in partnership with the San Diego County School Board Association and school districts across the county. If approved, these services will use a multi-tiered approach which includes universal screening of students facilitated by middle school staff, regardless of the child's insurance status.

Based on the screening results, students will be stratified into three different tiers of intervention: school community and classroom-based intervention which is known as Tier 1; small group intervention which is known as Tier 2; and referral to treatment level services known as Tier 3 which will leverage the County of San Diego (County), Health and Human Services Agency Behavioral Health Services (BHS) operated SchoolLink programs.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Frameworks are often utilized in education settings with Tier 1 delineated as prevention for all students; Tier 2 is defined as targeted interventions for some students based on mild level of need; and Tier 3 offering targeted intensive interventions for few students who require that level of support. School literature further describes the MTSS Framework in the following way:

Tier 1 – Universal or primary – Majority of students (75-90%)

As the largest tier, and the foundation for the MTSS Framework, Tier 1 encompasses the entire school with core instructions and basic interventions. This structure helps to build positive relationships between staff and students. It includes proactive classroom management strategies aimed at creating a supportive atmosphere. Students who do not respond to these interventions may move into Tier 2.

Tier 2 – Secondary – Small groups of students (10-25%)

Some students need a little extra assistance in meeting academic and behavioral goals, and it is in Tier 2 that these individuals receive that help. Often these interventions and supports are delivered in small group settings, such as reading groups. Check-In/Check-Out interventions are often a part of Tier 2, as well. This targeted support allows students to work toward catching up with their peers.

Tier 3 – Tertiary – Individual students (< 10%)

A subset of students has significant challenges that do not respond to the interventions and supports in Tier 1 or Tier 2. Tier 3 gives these students individualized supports and can include assistance from outside agencies such as behavioral counselors or family therapists.

In addition to stratifying students into the right level of services, the *Screening to Care* initiative will serve as the Tier 2 service provider for students who present with moderate level of mental health support needs. Services will attend to addressing stigma, promote acceptance, empathy, and compassion and be delivered in a culturally competent manner in alignment with BHS' long-term commitment to creating and maintaining a culturally relevant and culturally responsive system of

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care. Expansion to elementary and high school students shall be determined as service effectiveness is evaluated. *Screening to Care* services will be initially funded through American Rescue Plan Act funding for three years, with plans to explore funding opportunities to sustain the program on a long-term basis.

Today's action seeks approval to authorize a competitive solicitation for the procurement of *Screening to Care* services which will offer mental health services to middle school students in school districts through six contracts operating in the six regions as defined by the California Department of Education.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's action to authorize procurement of the *Screening to Care* initiative supports the County of San Diego's (County) vision of *Live Well San Diego* and aligns with the County's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan Initiatives of Equity (Health) and Community (Engagement, Quality of Life, and Partnership) by ensuring that children and youth with mental illness and substance use conditions continue to have access to a comprehensive continuum of behavioral health services administered through accessible behavioral health programs.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Robbins-Meyer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

HELEN N. ROBBINS-MEYER
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A